

“NOW IT GOT A NEW LIFE”:
ON REUSE AS A TECHNOLOGY OF TRANSFORMATION

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ABSTRACT

This article sets out to explore how reuse is enacted in a Swedish-language Facebook group called Reuse More. In this forum, people are encouraged to post photos and descriptions of what they have reused and how, share with and inspire others to be creative, and act sustainably. By viewing reuse as a technology of transformation that involves valuation, moves and movements, assembly and disassembly, I will, through empirical examples from the forum, discuss how people relate to, work and negotiate with, things and materials in their homes that are in the process of disposal, redirecting them to a ‘new life’.

KEYWORDS: transformation • reuse • valuation • sustainability • social media

INTRODUCTION

This article sets out to explore how reuse is enacted in a Facebook group called Reuse More. In this forum, people are encouraged to post photos and descriptions of what they have reused and how, share with and inspire others to be creative, and act sustainably. By viewing reuse as a technology of transformation that involves valuation, moves and movements, assembly and disassembly, I will, through empirical examples from the forum, discuss how people relate to, work and negotiate with, things and materials in their homes that are in the process of disposal. What happens with worn furniture, dishwashers, kitchen sinks, jars, collector’s plates and looms as in one way or another they no longer fit in?

Ethnographic research has pointed to the many contradictory and ambivalent feelings that things can give rise to and how it still can be difficult to detach from them. Things carry identities and memories of both significant others and a past self and can be connected to ideas of the future in ways that make it hard to give them up (Lovatt 2015; Koskinen-Koivisto and Kajander 2024; Petersson McIntyre and Mellander 2024; Woodward 2025). The idea that we live in a throw-away society where people mindlessly discard things has been challenged by ethnographic studies of households that show how disposal is no linear or straightforward process but full of negotiations (Gregson 2007; Gregson et al. 2007), and an affective and morally demanding process

that takes “time and effort, knowledge, skills, and emotional work” (Kajander and Koskinen-Koivisto 2024: 239).

The arrangement of things at home has been described both in terms of editing (Martinez and Errázuriz 2024) and curating (Morgan and Macdonald 2020), concepts that put an emphasis on selection and deselection of things. This sorting and ridding is ongoing in everyday life and can become extra urgent and necessary at critical life moments and times of transition, such as the passing of a relative or moving to a new home (*ibid.*). In such processes, people might both store things away (Brembeck 2019; Martínez 2024) and make much effort to try to dispose of things they no longer want or use by using second hand economies of different kinds (Gregson et al. 2007; Palm-sköld 2015). Social media has multiplied such possible channels for selling or donating (Kinnunen 2017: 92). Research on donating to charity shops or through online forums has found that when trying to find a new home for things they donate people also imagine future uses, which can be necessary when releasing some things (Lovatt 2015), or could indicate to recipients how things could be valued and used in the future (Kouhia and Janhonen 2024). Donating has been interpreted as a form of creative waste management (*ibid.*) and as a passing on of value (Gregson et al. 2007) where charity shops can function as a ‘moral’ outlet for unwanted items (Lovatt 2015; Palm-sköld 2015; Bohlin 2019). Reuse, in the sense I will be discussing here, can be understood as one such channel for the superfluous and unwanted, where things are on their way out of life, use and time, but then redirected in and back to a ‘new life’. A breaking point becomes a turning point. How is this done?

REUSE AS TECHNOLOGY OF TRANSFORMATION

The focus of this article is on how reuse plays out as a technology of transformation, when people relate to, value and deal with things and materials in their homes that are in the process of disposal. The question is then in what ways these things exist, how they are valued and engaged with, and how reuse as a material and social practice transforms things, selves and environments. Technology of transformation has been conceptualised by Andrew Sanchez (2022) as the capacity to effect material or social change upon the world, which he proposes as an analytic with which to address questions of how value is generated and negotiated in work processes. I take up technology of transformation as an analytic to ask questions about transformations that are carried out with reuse in processes that are entwined with disposal.

Disposal can mean removal, but as Kevin Hetherington (2004) points out, it can also mean to have something “at your disposal”, to keep it. Like Hetherington, I understand placing and movement as central to disposal, and disposal as a dynamic process where ordering work gets done and value is moved on. Orvar Löfgren and Barbara Czarniawska (2019: 11) conclude that across contexts, management of overflow is a transformative process, often with attempts to turn the unmanageable into a new type of order. Dealing with the domestic overflow of things, with the obsolete, worn out, superfluous, with things that are out of use, can involve many transformations that connect to the processes of disposal and how things are moved around, up and down, and stored away. As Löfgren (2012) has pointed out, the most drastic transformation takes place when something eventually leaves the house.

Michael Thompson's rubbish theory (2017 [1979]) has been influential on studies of waste and value transformation. His theory is based on the social and cultural dynamics through which something that has been classified as rubbish can be revalued and elevated to the status of antiquity, collector's items or cultural heritage, often after a long time has passed. To understand these processes, he places rubbish in a central position as enabling movements from the category of transient objects with short life-cycles that are decreasing in value, to durable, timeless objects of permanent or increasing value. Thompson's theory has been criticised for not taking into account materiality and how things can also resist and are not passive (Greeson et al. 2020; Woodward 2021). As Emma Greeson (2020) also points out, many other kinds of value transformative mechanism are at work in the processes of disposal which deal with transient things that are not necessarily considered of zero value, while at the same time these mechanisms do not elevate things to the point where they are considered of eternal value. However, I find Thompson's theory useful for addressing questions of how rubbish can work like a "fulcrum point" and not an end point (Gregson et al. 2010) and the ways this affects the logics and practices of reuse as transformational practice. Exploring how disposal is intertwined with reuse, I draw on a theoretical perspective that views processes of doing and undoing as always ongoing and in tension (Lucas and Dawdy 2025). Processes of assembly and disassembly are always connected, and thinking in terms of assemblages can shed light on how waste is enacted together with value as well as the transitional moments between and within these categories (Greeson et al. 2020: 153). From this perspective, valuation can be approached both as a problem and a situated practice that involves entwined dimensions of classification and judgment as well as of making something better or more valuable. Value is not dependent on fixed variables but rather on contrasts that emerge in practice (Heuts and Mol 2013). There are many co-existing regimes of valuation that relate to different concerns and tensions both within and between these regimes. This means that there are also multiple modes and ways of transforming something that sometimes compete and lead to clashes and compromises (ibid.; Greeson et al. 2020: 153).

I will discuss how cultural, moral and affective domestic disposal and ordering processes are deeply intertwined with reuse as a technology of transformation by analysing enactments of reuse in an online forum. Taking inspiration from Annemarie Mol (2021), the posts can be regarded as empirical situations that allow exploration of how reuse is enacted and negotiated socially and materially, and how words, metaphors and models shape enactments of reuse. To do this, I use the method of close reading, striving to bring forth the nuances of reuse practices by juxtaposing a limited number of posts. Through a close reading of these posts – descriptions, photos, reactions in the form of emojis, comments and discussions – I will analyse enactments of reuse in order to discover how reuse as a technology of transformation works in different ways with domestic assemblages and what Sophie Woodward (2025) has called the potency of things. Much reuse that is posted about in the forum makes use of second-hand goods, things that have been found or salvaged and to some degree also cheap, new things. I have, however, chosen to discuss examples in which people (to a large extent) work with things that they already own and have in or around their homes, and not with things recently acquired.

TO REUSE MORE: AN EXHIBITION, FORUM AND ARCHIVE OF REUSE

The interest in and popularity of reuse in contemporary Sweden is large and growing. It spans several sectors such as second-hand, charity, design, fashion and craft (Palm-sköld 2013; Fredriksson 2016; Bohlin 2019). With the pace of increase in consumption accelerating, reuse practices have become connected with a certain kind of subjectivity of an informed, moral and caring consumer, reducing waste and saving resources (Bohlin 2019).

The site that I have been following and observing ethnographically centres around reuse. Reuse More is a Swedish-language public Facebook group founded in 2009 that is accessible to and used by Swedish speakers in Sweden, Finland and elsewhere. The group is large and has around 500,000 members. The guidelines for the group state several times that “the flow is enormous” and that it “changes all the time”. People are therefore advised to see posts quickly and immediately save and take screenshots of instances of reuse they like. The forum also has a search function and an image gallery that can be used to find posts.

The group functions like a forum for and an exhibition of reuse, where reuse is presented with photos and descriptions that are answered with comments and reactions (likes, hearts and other emojis) to what is posted. I have been following this group since 2022, in periods just observing and in other periods more intensely by taking notes, saving and screenshotting posts. I have screenshotted 178 posts, including their comment sections. My method for selecting and collecting material has grown out of observations made in the forum and by utilising features that the digital platform affords. As there is a search function, it is possible to search with different keywords among the large number of posts. In this way, the forum can be approached as an ever-evolving archive of enactments of reuse, where it is possible to follow certain recurring expressions and words of importance for understanding valuation processes in reuse (for example, variations of “I don’t know if this counts as reuse” or metaphors like “facelift”), and where one can centre on and follow how specific things have been reused in different ways in order to better understand the social and material negotiations involved in reuse. This method of using the search function also works to circumvent the algorithmic curation of content on Facebook that can pose methodological challenges (cf. Ekelund 2025). The observations, collecting of posts, and analysis have been an intertwined and reflexive process in the fieldwork, a methodological approach that Robin Ekelund (*ibid.*) has also discussed in relation to ethnographic and qualitative analysis of practices in Facebook groups.

Coppellie Cocq and Evelina Liliequist (2024) have discussed the need for context-oriented ethics in dealing with social media material in ethnographic studies. Even if the forum is public, people probably do not expect their posts, photos or discussions to be found in an article. Sometimes issues of how people handle their things are also sensitive and call for ethical considerations (Gregson et al. 2009). I will describe photos and use citations that I have translated into English. I have obtained consent to use the two photos included in this article from the people who posted them. There will be a lot of “someones” appearing in this text, which is both a way of anonymising posters and a way of concentrating on enactments of reuse, rather than interpreting posts through

social categories such as the gender or age of the posters. I have also not specified when the posts were posted, as the focus of this article is not to identify patterns in how understandings of reuse might have changed during the existence of the forum (from 2009 onwards), but rather to discuss some recurrent forms and variations, movements and moves, in enactments of reuse as technology of transformation.

The forum is connected to an online shop for craft books that the founder of the group runs and which is based in Sweden. Now and then there are ads for craft books, but these do not play any dominant role in the stream of posts and other ads are not allowed. What does matter for how reuse is enacted in this forum, is the connection of reuse to craft and creativity and how this makes it possible to frame reuse as craft that materialises in its products. In the rules and instructions that shape the interactions in the forum, participants are encouraged to post “finished reuse”, and the suggestion is that they do so with before and after photos and a description. Thus, reuse is both action and result. What is more, reuse functions as what David Graeber (2013) has called a metavalue or overall criteria in the forum. It is what joins all the different practices and their results together in a common forum.

The purpose stated is to be a forum where people inspire each other to reuse more. There is no mention of sustainability, economy or other moral motivations or agendas for reuse in the presentation of the forum and its rules. It is likely that this does not need to be pointed out explicitly, as reuse is already strongly connected to sustainability and concern for the environment in Sweden (Bohlin 2019), which also applies to reuse in its forms of creative joy and craft challenge (Palmsköld 2013) by turning old into new (Fredriksson 2016).

There is a flow of ideas, things and emotions in the forum. That the flow is enormous and changes all the time, as stated in the guidelines for the group, can be understood as a ceaseless stream of creativity, a promise that good ideas for reuse will keep on flowing. Flow is a metaphor that appears in discourses of creativity (e.g. Csikszentmihályi 1990) as well as an ideal for home-making that successfully manages in- and outflows and removes any clogging or clutter (Czarniawska and Löfgren 2019; Morgan and McDonald 2020). An important rule in the guidelines for the group is not to make any negative comments about the reuse posted, but only comment with an encouraging and positive attitude. Negative comments are deleted by the administrators, and sometimes the comment section is closed. When this happens, a standard comment from the administrators is that comments were deleted as the focus was not on reuse. In this way, the group constitutes a certain affective economy, where positive emotions are normative and circulate to “align individuals ... with communities through the very intensity of their attachments” (Ahmed 2004: 119). Comments on posts are in general encouraging and positive, often emphasising good, clever, fun ideas with energetic emojis, contributing to the flow by amplifying certain emotions. These reactions can be interpreted as affective tools, conveying emotions (Sandell and Lillbroända-Annala 2024). However, critical comments leave traces even after they have been deleted, and I will address these to analyse tensions within enactments of reuse.

The analysis that follows is structured in three sections with the overarching logic being to focus on enactments of reuse as a technology of transformation and valuation process, involving movements and moves, assembly and disassembly. I will also address how emotions are part of these movements and processes. In the first section

I will discuss how things are moved into the domestic ecology and how this connects with the valuation and transformation of aged surfaces. The next section will delve into things that are moved around and assembled in more lateral ways, and questions of clutter as both moral burden and resource. The final section takes up examples of reuse that involve disassembling things in order to reassemble them in new ways, and how this can be both productive and destructive of value.

MOVING IN THE WORN, TIRED AND DIRTY: FACELIFT AND CLEANING

In the guidelines for the forum, people are instructed to post reuse with before and after pictures and descriptions. Positioned in this way, this model for enacting and displaying reuse transformations can be said to be dominant in the forum. In practice, there are also other ways, which I will come to later in this article. In this section, I will discuss the kind of transformation that before and after photos are good at capturing and how this form itself participates in configuring transformations and their temporality, the past and present.

When before and after photos appear, they are most often centred around one individual thing. These transformations often involve pieces of furniture that have been painted, and surface treatments of for example vases and other decorative pieces. What was before is described and valued as dated, tired, boring, ugly and not fitting in in the home or with the owner's taste and sense of style. It is then transformed by freshening up and renewal in order to give it a place, a new life or a second chance. The principles and logics of the aesthetic ecologies of the home can vary greatly and have been discussed as a class-related matter that affects and is affected by how things are used, placed and valued, as well as when they are considered useless or are disposed of (Muñoz et al. 2022). In the examples that follow, there are practical, social and material negotiations that concern not only the transformation of an individual thing, but also how it can be moved from the periphery into the aesthetic ecology of the home.

I don't know if this counts as reuse, more of a renovation perhaps. But since this rather boring Ikea chest of drawers didn't fit in at all in our home, it was confined in the wardrobe. Now it got a new life and pride of place in the home, so we could call it a bit of reuse (after picture in the comments, not white).

The before photo posted shows a wood-coloured chest of drawers standing in the middle of a room with nothing else in the photo. It looks as though it is on its way somewhere. The after photo posted in the comment section shows the same piece of furniture, placed against a white wall and now with a colourful geometric pattern on the front panel, sides and top painted black. It also has a matching, colourful lamp and a candle lantern standing on the top. The post has received about 500 likes (thumbs up) and in the comment section there are about 100 comments.

The before and after model of enacting transformation does not show what happens between these points. Since there is no insight into the technical process whereby the things presented have been made, there is an effect of sudden, surprising or even magical transformation, which is how Alfred Gell (1992) has theorised art objects, link-

ing technology to enchantment and the power to influence. In the forum, the chest of drawers evokes curiosity and questions. The work done can sometimes be described in the text accompanying the before and after photos, and people also frequently ask about this in the comment section. In this case, the poster answered many questions about method and materials, explaining that a certain wallpaper, varnish and paint were used. There are many comments with exclamation marks that show people are impressed – wow, cool, super nice – and emojis that express the same affects. The poster replies and explains that as there are a lot of white surfaces in the home, this piece becomes like a breath of fresh air. There is something dynamic and lively about it now. “From boring and bland to a flaming splash of colour”, someone comments to conclude the transformation. Others comment that they have been thinking about what to do with the same boring piece of furniture they own themselves, but now they know: “Really nice! I have one too that will get a facelift after this!”

Reuse as a technology of transformation analogous to a facelift is at work in instances where an aged or worn thing is refreshed in different ways and renewed with a focus on the surface. A ‘facelift’ can be understood as a conceptual transfer of prevailing technologies between different domains, affecting how people imagine the world (Manovich 2001), in this case ways of relating to, valuing and transforming aged surfaces.

A genre that resembles the before and after model of transformation is the make-over as a TV genre. In this genre, there is a staging of surprise and a dramatisation of the transformations that involve tensions of submission and empowerment, of becoming both normal and unique in relation to prevailing ideals (Weber 2009). Aesthetics in fashion, such as shabby chic or vintage, can motivate people to keep and reuse things that would otherwise have been disposed of (Lovatt 2015), plenty of examples of which exist on this forum. That the poster in the example above finds it necessary to add “not white” in brackets to the description shows that the fashion for certain colours and styles also wears out and the transformations become predictable, no longer accomplishing the transformational ‘lift’ that is an underlying promise of the before and after model.

Robert Willim (2024: 110–124) has discussed how specific imaginaries are reinforced at certain times and in certain contexts, not just through conceptual transfer but in an intricate play between concepts, technologies, aesthetics and practices that come to “fit together”, resulting in what he calls conceptual congruity. This unfolding of imaginaries is entwined with the ways we engage with things, he argues. In the cases where reuse transformations have become too predictable, it is as if the conceptual congruity of reuse, with its combinations of technology, materials, aesthetics and practices, has become too static and doesn’t allow for movement and variation.

A dishwasher is introduced and the poster comments that it might not be directly reuse, but that the dishwasher had a facelift instead of being discarded and replaced with a new one. On the photo posted there is a white dishwasher, decorated with pink flowers and black birds. In the comment section, the poster replies to questions and appreciative comments about how clever this method is and the good result, adding that the kitchen became a bit livelier and that the decorative stickers were cheap in comparison to buying a new dishwasher. Someone comments: “Really nice, but a small question, why replace something that works?” The poster replies that the dishwasher would have been sold in that case and explains that the kitchen was recently renovated,

so they wanted a dishwasher that fitted in better. The commentator answers: “Then I understand [smiley emoji] Unfortunately there are many who throw away functioning things only to buy new and modern [sad, concerned emoji].”

With reuse positioned as an alternative to discarding, reuse narratives often give dramatic accounts of how something was going to be thrown away or was about to be destroyed when the course of events turned and it was rescued by transformational acts of reuse. This is reminiscent of William Labov’s (2013) discussion of how dramatic events of life and death are narrated and made sense of in relation to and in comparison with what could have happened in a parallel, alternative universe, so that the significance of the outcome is emphasised. Negation functions as an evaluative device in these narratives. In the examples above, both posters express how they are not sure if what they made counts as reuse. The things that are remade and reused have not exactly passed through the category of rubbish, which Thompson (2017 [1979]) has theorised as being central to and enabling value transformation between what he calls the category of transient things that wear out, and durable, timeless things of lasting value. Thompson’s rubbish theory, in that sense, also deals with dramatic changes in value, not the many transformatory movements that are taking place as things wear out, change contexts or are put to new uses (cf. Greeson 2020).

The tendency in affluent countries to pursue newness in the home specifically regarding surfaces, and how mass-produced furniture and appliances that have surfaces vulnerable to wear and tear reinforce this tendency, has been analysed as the “kitchenification” of the home with frequent renovations and renewals (Raahauge 2024). The examples discussed above deal with such contemporary, worn things and their problematic state of not fitting in. In the case of the dishwasher, the renewal of the rest of the kitchen enhanced its wornness, emphasising that it no longer fitted in. Hence the kitchen demanded a new dishwasher. There is an important relationality to valuations of wornness. The chest of drawers had already been taken out of sight and put in what Erving Goffman (1959) has called the back regions but found a way of re-entering the limelight. Here it is interesting that the solution in both cases was not to make these things more similar to their environment to fit in better, but rather to increase their difference – to make them stand out. In that way, and through contrast, they could contribute some ‘life’ to their environments.

Surfaces record traces of life and use, which can be experienced both positively as an accumulated patina that enhances remembrance, and negatively as wear and tear and deficiency. It might be, as Kirsten Marie Raahauge (2024) suggests, that certain surface materials and the imaginaries connected with them are better at taking up patina than others (no one was discussing the patina of the IKEA furniture or dishwasher in the example above). In the following example the question of patina comes up with some friction.

“My daughter, soon 2 years old, can sleep her first night in a nice bed from the start of 1900 [heart emoji, sleep emoji]”, a poster writes and attaches two photos. In the first there is a bed placed out on a garden, perhaps in front of a garage or outbuilding, where it is surrounded by car tyres, a barbeque, a garden table and other things. It is a wooden pull-out bed with worn green paint. In the second photo, placed under the first, the same bed can be seen painted white and made with white and pink bedding. There are some soft toys in the bed. It is now in a room inside the house, placed by a wall next to

a white shelf. This post has 3,800 reactions (likes, hearts and “wow” emojis) and around 100 comments.

The comment thread is long, and there are a lot of comments giving praise as well as some in which people have shared their own memories and experiences with similar pieces of furniture, or how they have also reused items in a similar way. This is very common in the forum, and in that sense it is clear that the things dealt with are both personal possessions and a collective ecology of things that both facilitate the spread of good ideas for reuse in the present, and can fill threads with memories and reflections on the past. “Old furniture connects the past with the present”, someone comments. Others reply with comments talking of how the bed evokes thoughts and feelings about the past, inviting memories and imaginations of the past: “Perhaps that’s why we love old furniture so much.” These comments are not so much about judging how successful or not reuse as a technology of transformation has been, but about letting oneself be affected and transported through the imaginations of the past that the bed activates.

In the discussion thread there are traces of comments that have been erased by the forum administrators. From counter comments to these we can conclude that the criticism concerned destruction of value. Such comments appear now and then when it comes to painted pieces of furniture, in situations where people might interpret and value these as antiquities, design objects or cultural heritage that should not be painted but preserved in the state they are in, or close to it. Traces of previous use can also imbue things with a sociality that is different to the new and unused, positively experienced and valued as a kind of growth that is of importance in the circulation of second-hand goods (Appelgren and Bohlin 2015; Bohlin 2019). Someone encourages the poster with the comment: “Things can be nice, as in old, but this is nice and useful. I think it is much better it’s used than continues to lay there [like emoji, heart emoji] and it is really nice.” The poster responds: “Thanks! [heart emoji] I think so too. It was really worn out and had been in a shed for ages. Now it continues to live in our home [heart-eyed smiley emoji].”

This example of reuse involves moving what has been kept in storage into the home, which is of importance for the kind of action and transformation that reusing becomes. In this case the alternative course of events that reuse as an intervention is contrasted to is the bed decaying in the shed. Thereby reusing is saving, accommodating and ensuring a continued life. Someone comments: “The bed is very nice and better to paint it and someone uses it, than it remains hidden in the shed and decays [like emoji, heart emoji].”

In other comments, the history of the bed that was kept out in the shed also plays an important role in how it is valued and what kind of transformation would be required for it to be moved in and made use of as a bed. Someone writes: “It became super nice, hope the little one likes it [smiley emoji]. I don’t think one would have wanted it indoors as it was before, at least not for a child.” The poster agrees and writes that it was “disgusting before”. That some critical comments concerned the patina of the bed as a value lost becomes apparent through counter comments. But the aged surface can also be understood and experienced as dirty, even dangerous. Someone else comments on the potentially dangerous chemicals old paint could contain and concludes “sometimes you need to choose between ‘historically correct’ and safety [smiley emoji]”. Painting becomes a way of cleaning and dealing with risk.

What is 'before' when it comes to an old piece of furniture, and what would be historically correct, deduced from the past? This temporal matter is discussed in the comments. "You did the right thing to paint the bed, why should your child be forced to live in the past?" The bed comes to function as if it had a direct connection with the past, like a time machine to a past where one would not want to live. But this time machine can also work in the other direction, by reference to how people in the past would have valued and acted with regards to the same piece of furniture, had they been transported to the present: "Stable and nice bed. Your ancestors would be proud if they saw it"; "This is a great example of showing respect for previous generations. It has apparently been repainted at least once and used many times, and now it can continue to be used [heart emoji] beautifully and timelessly painted too [heart emoji]"; and "All who comment negatively, do you know that they repainted furniture in the past too [smiley emoji]?" Heritage thereby comes to mean to act as the poster did by following the tradition of painting, at the same time drawing the ancestors closer by accommodating the inherited bed.

In this and many other posts where the value of antiquities or cultural heritage are brought up to question how successful the reuse transformations have been, the discussions tend to split and dichotomise monetary and affective value when critical comments are met with counterarguments. Those who complain that antiquities have been destroyed, can in their turn be accused of only caring about money, whereas transformation through reuse is understood and contrasted as an act of love: "Not everything can be valued in money. This is the value of one's child getting to sleep in a really nice bed that one has put a lot of work and effort into. That's value in love [heart emoji]."

MOVING AROUND: ASSEMBLING WHAT IS LAYING ABOUT

To find new ways of using something can be motivated by an effort to discard as little as possible, which can extend even to the smallest items. Someone, for example, shares a post about finally having found a use even for the plastic clips attached to bread packaging, illustrated with a photo of these taken into use as clips to support a potted plant.

The zero waste movement strives to reduce waste using the 'refuse, reduce, reuse, recycle, rot' principle in consumption. Largely, reuse in this context is a strategy to reduce waste by replacing single use products with items that can be used many times, such as glass jars instead of plastic or paper, reusable nappies made of fabric instead of single use nappies (Bissmont 2020: 355, 358). In contrast, reuse that works with disposable material at home can take the form of re-placement, rather than substitution. The example above of the plastic clips would be like fitting new pieces to an everchanging puzzle, checking where odd pieces might find a place and a use in the arrangements of the home. Where and how can something be attached? What can the home incorporate? This involves a thinking with things, valuing and negotiating what something can become and how it can be put to use. Gay Hawkins (2006) has called this work with the mutability of things "arts of transience".

An understanding of reuse as a means of using things in new ways in this forum also brings up questions of what can be considered a new way or idea, and what are established, common, uses that everyone knows about. Posting and presenting reuse

with an expressed hesitation about whether it “counts as reuse”, can sometimes show the tension between innovation and convention and the value of sharing new ideas that is an undercurrent in this forum. This hesitation can show up in cases of reusing empty packaging, paper and containers. Previous research has showed how widespread, varied and complex such reuse is (Errázuriz and Greene 2021; Teidearu 2024). At the same time, such practices can be taken for granted and therefore neither reflected upon nor recognised as reuse (Shipton and Fisher 2010: 370–371). It is still common in the forum to share such ideas. In this post, someone shares the idea to reuse an empty glass jar:

Not sure if this counts as reuse, but the Nutella jar got a new life as a detergent jar with a perfect grip! I never spill any detergent anymore as I used to with the carton. Probably not a new idea to keep detergent in jars, but a really good thing for me, who is still at the stage of discovering reuse.

This post also includes a photo of a hand holding the glass jar (labels removed), filled with detergent. The washing machine can be seen in the background, as if the hand was ready to fill the detergent tray. In the comments under the post, others assure the poster that this “counts as reuse” and share their ways of using empty jars and bottles. The poster presents themselves as someone who is now discovering reuse. In that sense, the value of the posted method does not have to be its originality or newness as an innovation, but transformation becomes more a question of learning how to become a reuser with a special disposition, who is open to potentials and possibilities of transformation in the environment and acts on them. The poster also adds something of their own: the grip, which emerges as the hand holds and tips the jar, and is therefore neither a property of the jar nor the hand, but a matter of compatibility and capacities released in a new assemblage (cf. DeLanda 2006). Reuse is situational and comes in countless variations, much like the ways things can be combined with other things, bodies and spaces in the ever-changing ecology of the home (Muñoz et al. 2022). “There is no way to tell in advance in what way a given entity may affect or be affected by innumerable other entities”, as Manuel DeLanda (2006: 15) points out in his theorising of assemblages.

In the new assemblages created using things in other ways than originally intended, reuse is seldom posted with before and after photos. In the case of, for example, the Nutella jar turned into a detergent container, the jar itself has not changed much except for the removal of the original label. The description in the post explains what the jar used to be for, in addition to which people might recognise it in the photo. There is a lot of experimentation in the forum with what something can become and what surprising capacities can be activated, as things are imaginatively moved around and used in new ways: a CD tower became a lamp, a bra became eye protection for a horse, a pendulum clock became a cabinet and a barbeque became a flower pot, for example. Sara Ahmed (2019) has discussed what she calls the “strange temporalities of use” and how use both can come before as indications of what something is for, and after when something existing is taken up and used, sometimes in other ways than intended. Reuse that works by inventing new uses for things often does not seem to need before and after photos. Building on the recognisability of what something used to be for, the point is to show what it became by capturing the transformation materialised in a new assemblage in a single photo. Such transformation assemblages can evoke diverse emotions, nostalgia, humour and surprise among them.

When a single thing is not the focus of the transformation, but rather several different materials, it can be both more difficult and less meaningful to the logic of the transformation to capture reuse with before and after photos. This is evident when reuse bricolages become more elaborate. In these cases the posted photo tends to show the result and the descriptive text accompanying it lays out what was before. The lists pertaining to before can be long, as is, for example, often the case regarding the building of potting benches and outdoor kitchens, rather popular reuse projects in the forum:

A potting bench for my wife! The sink we got for free, the wooden slats for the shelf are leftovers from when we built a fence a few years ago and the beams have served as part of the neighbour's roof for 48 years before I took care of them (the paint was on sale, so it didn't cost much either).

The photo posted shows the potting bench standing in the garden in front of a hedge, the wood parts painted red and the sink metal surface shining. It is summer. Right next to it is a wooden fence, painted in the same red colour as the bench. That this type of reuse is popular shows in the large number of likes with about 1,700 thumbs up reactions. In this case the thumbs up reaction dominates with fewer heart emoji reactions to the post, which are often used to signal attachment, love and loss. I interpret thumbs up as underscoring cleverness and a more technical mode of transformation, even if the project ("For my wife!") is also an act of love, which many comment on: "That's true love!" The lining up of salvaged materials from many different sources and places heightens the 'reuse factor' of the project and the inventiveness of its maker, having been able to both find, make use of and fit together all the diverse pieces and materials. Something has been made out of 'nothing', with no significant cost by paying attention to the materials and potentials of "what there already is". These variously distributed materials cannot be captured in a single before photo. What was before in these cases could be the need for a potting bench, but also a garden full of rubbish or material, depending on how these are valued. Clutter can be understood both as a moral failing and as a resource with the potential to revalue and transform value, and as such clutter can involve competing moralities creating moral dilemmas (Woodward 2021). As a form of problem solving, reuse can be manifold, adding to the satisfaction obtained from getting rid of and making use of clutter, saving money and resources, and gaining something of value. According to Daniel Miller (2008), such a linking and bridging of arenas and forms of value that are contradictory and difficult to reconcile, is important for what value does and for how it is created in everyday life.

In some cases people still post before and after photos to show reuse projects of the kind that work with a variety of different components and materials. Such more unexpected accounts that diverge from the usual framing can be analytically interesting. One example is a potting bench similar to the one discussed above. The poster explains that it was made from an obsolete sink that had been replaced with a new one and some old pallets. Two photos are added to the post: the one marked after shows the finished bench placed in the garden against a wall, while the other, marked before, shows the same place without the bench but with a lilac growing there. The description continues, "also the lilac was reused, it just needed to change place [smiley emoji]". This focus on the same place before and after captures how one movement can create a wave, affecting more things that in their turn need to move, and how place and use connect with reuse and replacement. "Finished reuse" is not an endpoint. Processes of assembly and

disassembly are connected (Greeson et al. 2020), and so in the next section I will focus on situations where something needs to be disassembled in order to be reassembled.



Photo 1. Potting bench before (före) and after (efter), posted in "Reuse more".

MOVING OUT: DISASSEMBLING AND REASSEMBLING

What should you do with things you cannot keep that you still consider valuable but which nobody wants? People try to solve this dilemma with reuse in different ways. Someone posts about a weaving loom reused as material for a bench:

One hundred percent reuse. I had to get rid of my old weaving loom. Absolutely no one wanted it, so I had to drive it to the dump or burn it. Sad but true. Some parts were too big to fit into the car, so I had to saw them into pieces. Then suddenly I saw they could become a wooden bench in the garden. With some paint it would

be nicer, I'll do that later. I am an old lady without previous experience of wood-working, so I can be a little bit proud [smiley emoji].

In the photo posted, there is a small wooden bench placed outdoors in front of a red wall and a man standing next to the bench, pointing at it. The backrest has an asymmetrical shape and a curved detail on the top. In front of the bench there is a black box, perhaps the case for a woodworking tool. The poster adds to her description:

I only regret that I didn't think of all the other things the weaving loom could have become, for example a shed, a table, a doghouse and so on. But it was too late, as most of the loom was already in a container at the dump.

In Sweden and other Nordic countries hand weaving is practiced as a hobby, predominantly by women aged over 50. Much of the hobby weaving takes place in courses and spaces with shared looms, as big floor looms can be a spatial challenge (Tolnov Clausen 2025: 17, 35, 45). While a few commented on the finished result, "cool and unique bench", the majority of comments focus on the dilemma of owning a loom that there is no longer space for, with several mentioning this when moving from a house to a smaller apartment. They express sadness at having to dispose of their looms. Others share their own projects with disassembled looms; some have become bannisters, others garden swing seats, a table base or an outdoor kitchen.

The disassembly of a thing with certain purposes and meanings into pieces became a turning point where reuse came to be possible in the case above. Suddenly there was an opening where new potential uses could be imagined. What a weaving loom could become was not evident until it started to un-become a weaving loom, turning out to be "multiple, mutable and material" (Gregson et al. 2010: 847). But this unmaking and remaking constitutes a transformation with several steps that is not so straightforward, and as is evident from the discussion in connection to the post, it is not only an emotional process but also a processing and transformation of emotions. Someone comments: "It is hard to sell or even give away weaving looms. I know flea markets that give them away as firewood. Owners of looms feel bad when they have to slaughter them. Well done for being so inventive."

To that, someone else comments: "To need to 'slaughter' a beautiful birchwood loom, like the one I own, makes my heart hurt. I wish I could have done something useful with it too", and "Anything is better than the dump, well done!" In this way, reused looms can become something like a tribute. There is loss and grief, but there are also new beginnings and ways forward. The bench materialises this shift. Even if the transformation is irreversible, disassembling a thing can align with and be perceived as a way of saving it: "I think your project will be able to save many old looms now!", someone comments, and adds a row of emojis: an arm showing strength, clapping hands, a hand gesture for 'perfect' and a heart. It takes courage and inventiveness to accomplish this kind of reuse, this slaughter with love. Instead of a valuation oscillating between a functional and a deconstructed loom, it became a matter of either firewood or something new and useful. There is a change of temporal layers in the valuation, of which pasts and futures come to matter (cf. Brueckner Johansen et al. 2025). Before is not the functional loom turned bench but the loom turned pile of wood, then returned as a bench. Understood in this way, a garden bench is a victory, and as the poster says, the source of pride lies in having solved the problem imaginatively and crafted it herself.

When reuse is a way of dealing with unwanted but potentially valuable things, it can sometimes also turn into something like an iconoclastic gesture. This situation can involve things that are hard to classify as merely rubbish, but that are still not experienced as appealing or relevant in contemporary life. Here I will turn to the case of collectors' plates, intended as wall hung decorations. In contrast to the example of the weaving loom above, the example of reuse I will turn to now also provoked some negative reactions.

Collectors' plates with different themes and motifs were popular during the 1960–1980s in Sweden and many other countries. Most popular in the Swedish context was the Christmas plate. These plates were expensive and desired collectors' items, made in limited editions of quality porcelain by renowned Swedish manufacturers such as Gustavsberg and Rörstrand. They were sold in exclusive packaging, often with an authenticity certificate. A new plate was launched on an annual basis before Christmas. The plates were also marketed as an investment for the future, leading to speculation in Christmas plates. However, this bubble burst and since the 1990s interest in these plates has been declining. They can now be found in many flea markets at a low price (Nilsson 2022).

Collectors' plates, things that were once perceived as durable and even increasing in future value, potentially heirlooms, are in one post taken down from their actual and/or symbolic elevated position on the wall and are put in motion: "Christmas plates become garden edging." The post is illustrated with two photos. One is taken with a lawn in the foreground and plants, bushes and trees in the background. Where the vegetation starts in the distance, a blue line forms a border between lawn and plants. The other photo, placed under the first one, shows a close-up of the blue edge showing that it is formed by plates half dug into the soil. This post elicited mixed reactions along with emojis indicating 'wow' and laughter. In the comments under the post someone writes "Collectors' plates are impossible to get rid of" and someone else has commented "Genius! Finally a sensible use for those meaningless plates." Here reuse is about getting rid of something at the same time as putting it to use. The beautiful blue colour of the plates is commented on, as is how this quality is released in a new way: "They light up the garden!" What also caught some commentators' attention were questions of the material decay of the plates, and how this could be a quick process: what would happen to the plates in contact with the lawn mower, and in minus temperatures?

This reuse can also be interpreted as an iconoclastic act based on the traces of reactions and comments that in their absence are still present in the comment section under the post in the form of counter arguments. Some comments stating that the plates are valuable and should be preserved remain. According to Michael Taussig (2019: 22) icons have a "back-to-front" logic and are activated and brought to life when they are destroyed. Processes that concern iconicity, icons and iconoclasm are highly context and culture specific with contingent meanings and associations. What makes something an icon depends on people recognising and relating to it as such, and the icon having a wealth of associations. However, destruction can also be understood as a form of cultural production (Stapleton and Viselli: 2019: 7–10). Bruno Latour (2002: 20) has coined the concept *iconoclash* to indicate situations where there is doubt about whether an act is constructive or destructive: "Thus we can define *iconoclash* as what happens when there is *uncertainty* about the exact role of the hand at work in the production of a

mediator.” Latour (ibid.: 26) wants to direct attention towards the motives, effects and interpretations of icon destruction in order to understand better this role of the hand at work. The case of collectors’ plates turned garden edging speaks to such uncertainty. The case may very well have been, and probably was, that the plates had long since been taken down and stored. Nevertheless, this movement can come across as a sudden and dramatic fall to the ground, where the plates also start to undergo material transformation in a quite different way and at a different tempo to that of their former life, and through processes that are not controlled by humans. Such entropic processes, at once natural and social (Lucas 2010), can also be understood as productive of meaning and enabling different stories and memories than in the case of preservation of artefacts (DeSilvey 2006).

There are, however, less drastic ways to reuse collectors’ plates, in smaller incremental movements from elevation to a more everyday, practical use. Such gradual “downgrading” is also common when it comes to the reuse of clothes (Palmsköld 2013).



Photo 2. Christmas plates become flower pot saucers, posted in Reuse More.

Another person posts a photo of a collectors’ plate on a table. It has a Christmas motif in blue and white and on the edge of the plate there is the text *Juleaften 1987* (‘Christmas Eve 1987’). This is a Danish Christmas plate from 1987. Next to the plate on the table there is a large potted plant and under the pot can be seen a similar plate. That the plate under the pot is a collectors’ plate would not necessarily be noticed if it was not for the other plate next to it, which encourages the comparison. “Now the Christmas plates can become flowerpot saucers after having been used as dessert plates for a few years.” It would be hard to understand both resistance to using these plates as plates, as well as the value transformation of doing so, without any knowledge of wall hung collectors’ plates, their trajectory and the way they have been valued and used in the past.

Christmas plates proved not to be a sustainable investment, but rather a “dream that burst” (Nilsson 2022). The infrastructures that moved Christmas plates around in a lively market of pas-

sionate interest disappeared and the plates started to collect dust. They were affected by “cultural wear and tear” in the sense that Anneli Palmsköld (2013) has discussed, when things outlive their time. Despite the collapse in value the plates stubbornly persisted as something “impossible to get rid of”. Why is this? Kevin Hetherington (2004) points to the importance of understanding the dynamics of disposing of things as processes where ordering work gets done and value is moved on. In this work, there is often a gap

between a first and second action (or a 'first and second burial'), a space where things are held at disposal for a second time, for example by storing them, so a settlement can be attained with their value. Unresolved questions of value can cause shock and return to haunt a person:

We see this most clearly when the expected processes associated with disposal are unfinished or are carried out in an ineffective manner and where questions of value are not properly honoured ... This is where the act of second burial has failed, been hurried or has not been carried out to its full effect. (Hetherington 2004: 170)

The difficulty disposing of collectors' plates, including ways of reusing them, can be understood as expressing the difficulty of coming to a settlement with their value. To give something a new life can also mean in some way ending its former life, while also passing on, negotiating and resolving questions of value.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

In this article I have analysed enactments of reuse in an online forum using transformation as an analytical lens to focus on questions about the social and material negotiations that are carried out with reuse. I have connected reuse with moral and emotional processes of disposal and valuation, and questions of how value is passed on and generated through moves and movements, assembly and disassembly. Reuse turns out to be a very culturally productive concept with the capacity to bring together a lot of practices related to material change that could also have been categorised differently, for example as domestic work, tips and hacks, hobby, craft, art, DIY, renovation and repair. Notions of sustainability as using what already exists instead of discarding it and/or buying something new, forms the common, moral ground that unites the different practices. In cases where uncertainty is expressed as to whether something that is posted counts as reuse, this sustainability formula is itself often reused and returned to in replies that say it does count. Thereby, reuse as a moral metavalue tied to sustainability is enforced. It can also be argued that reuse as a concept and a category contributes to making visible and revaluing both practices and things that are often overlooked.

Sanchez (2022: 364) argues that since some forms of work, such as domestic work, waste work and care work, are often perceived as non-transformative maintenance and are therefore underappreciated, "to be recognized as a person that transforms value [is] therefore an inherently political question, which reveals the ideologies and inequalities that structure any given social context". A focus on transformation can also "illuminate the subjective ways in which people find satisfaction and meaning in their work" (ibid.). The question of whether something counts as reuse, which is quite often expressed in the forum, can be translated into questions of what value transformations count and are socially recognised. People test, stretch and experiment with the concept of reuse. Reuse as concept and category is both capacious and ambiguous and there are tensions within it that people try to address when they post, present and make sense of their own (and others') reuse practices and how they matter, that is, in what way they work as a technology of transformation that generates value. In addition to sustainability, reuse brings some very prevalent themes in contemporary society, such as innovation, creativity and heritage to an everyday, practical and material level.

An undercurrent in the forum is the value of posting new ideas and ways of reusing and transforming, which can generate tension between innovation and convention and sideline what are perceived to be established and conventional ways of reuse as well as reuse that could be understood as forms of repair that extend the life of something, rather than transforming it. On the other hand, such distinctions are also fluid, complex and subject to negotiation in the forum. Reuse transformations are furthermore often enacted as variations even on the same theme or idea. Since the practices are situational and carried out in homes with domestic ecologies that can be similar but are not entirely identical in their composition, variations follow. In the comment sections to posts, people often respond with their own examples of similar reuse.

It is evident that reuse practices move in and work with an ecology of things that is both personal and collective, which facilitates the sharing of ideas, memories and emotions. In the posts, people can recognise things and many times also the dilemmas and problems they might cause in domestic ordering. As Woodward (2025) has discussed, attention to everyday things, their potentials, vitality and roles in people's lives can help illuminate the shared, public and moral in the everyday. Reuse can work as a way of both enhancing and releasing the potentials of everyday things, as well as solving or coming to terms with the problems and dilemmas associated with them, and often at the same time. Sometimes valuations, emotional and moral modes of relating and transforming, clash. Here there can also be disagreements and negotiation regarding what temporalities – what past, present and future – are taken into account and enacted as things are transformed and acquire new lives.

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